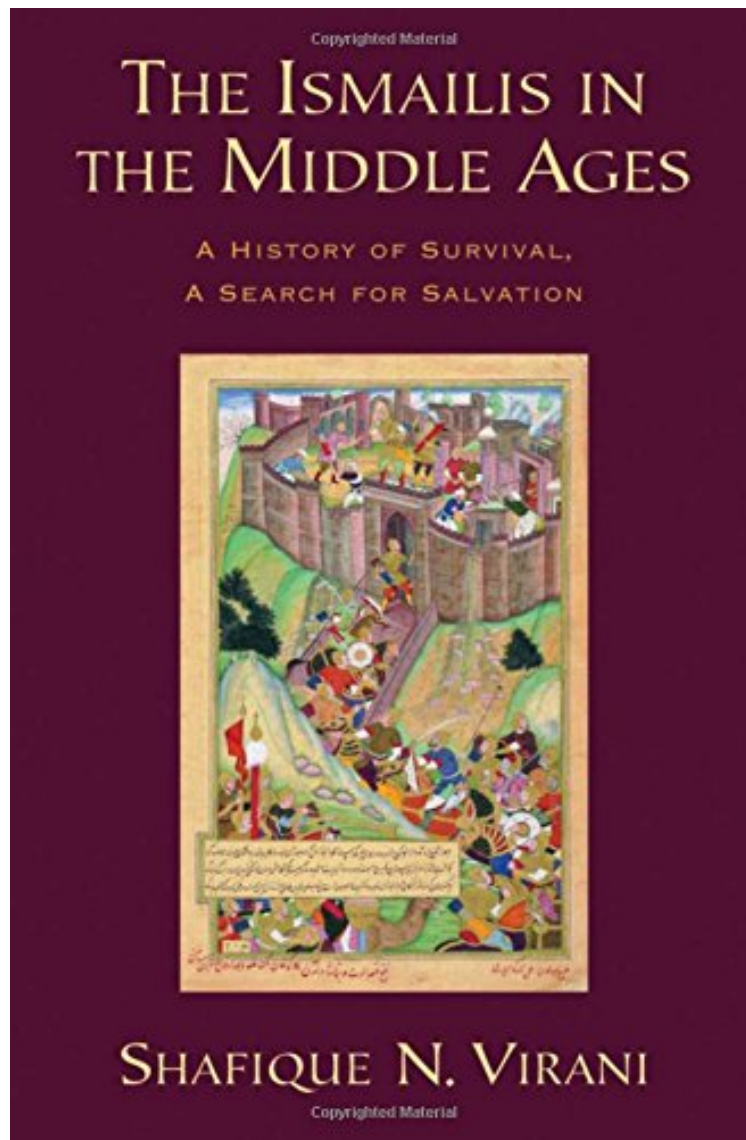


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The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation

Shafique N. Virani

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Shafique N. Virani : The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, a Search for Salvation:

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historical-era that the author encompasses is of fundamental importance to the Islamic world and its implications on various Muslim communities in the present. *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*, is a detailed yet interesting account of how the various Ismaili communities managed to construct an identity via various tactics so as to respond to the challenges of the various religious and socio-political scopic-regimes within their lands. The detective-like narrative style of the book makes it interesting and unique from the usual story book or academic treatise, because Shafique Virani starts off the book with a basic historical primer on various Muslims sects and the location of Shia-Ismailism within the particular context. Building upon this basic knowledge, the author references translations of various Saraiki, Gujarati, Russian, Arabic, Persian and other linguistic works along with informative critical analyses so as to cement the patches in the obscure history of the Ismailis during this era. An era of uncertainty, when the Ismaili communities in the aftermath of the destruction caused by Genghis Khan and his hordes attempted to gather themselves together and successfully thrive through the continuum of time. The book should not be taken as a mere historical-narrative of the invasion of the Mongols, rather it is an analysis of the various methods and strategies that the Ismailis used to safeguard their communities and religious-belief from other external threats during this time-period. It is almost like a success-story of a persecuted community almost brought to the brink of extinction due to the barbaric Mongol onslaught. I think, the book is bound to provoke an emotionally tear-jerking response along with its factually authentic account of the community and how it re-structured and preserved its vibrant historical traditions and the core-belief in the "Imam of the Time" so as to emerge from the ashes almost like what Virani describes as a "Phoenix." It should also be emphasized that *Ismailis in the Middle Ages* is a not to be taken lightly due to its engaging narrative as a mystery-book, rather it is a solid scholarly work that extracts information from solid and credible primary and secondary sources accompanied with detailed bibliographic referencing so as to allow the scholar or the curious average reader an opportunity to trail outside the covers of the book, and trace the origin of Shafique Virani's train of thought and interpretation of historical facts and arguments. In culmination, I would say that this book is a must-read by any serious scholar of history, religion or even the general-reader who wants a good leisure read.

"None of that people should be spared, not even the babe in its cradle." With these chilling words, the Mongol warlord Genghis Khan declared his intention to destroy the Ismailis, one of the most intellectually and politically significant Muslim communities of medieval Islamdom. The massacres that followed convinced observers that this powerful voice of Shi'i Islam had been forever silenced. Little was heard of these people for centuries, until their recent and dramatic emergence from obscurity. Today they exist as a dynamic and thriving community established in over twenty-five countries. Yet the interval between what appeared to have been their total annihilation, and their modern, seemingly phoenix-like renaissance, has remained shrouded in mystery. Drawing on an astonishing array of sources gathered from many countries around the globe, *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, A Search for Salvation* is a richly nuanced and compelling study of the murkiest portion of this era. In probing the period from the dark days when the Ismaili fortresses in Iran fell before the marauding Mongol hordes, to the emergence at Anjudan of the Ismaili Imams who provided a spiritual centre to a scattered community, this work explores the motivations, passions and presumptions of historical actors. With penetrating insight, Shafique N. Virani examines the rich esoteric thought that animated the Ismailis and enabled them to persevere. A work of remarkable erudition, this landmark book is essential reading for scholars of Islamic history and spirituality, Shi'ism and Iran. Both specialists and informed lay readers will take pleasure not only in its scholarly perception, but in its lively anecdotes, quotations of delightful poetry, and gripping narrative style. This is an extraordinary book of historical beauty and spiritual vision.

"The book offers a discerning and sensitive portrayal of the struggle for survival and the spiritual life of a religious community that endured severe persecution and extreme defamation during much of its history. The author in particular succeeds in bringing to light the esoteric spirituality and profound devotion to the living Imam prevalent in the centuries of concealment following the catastrophic Mongol attempt to annihilate Nizari Ismailism, relying on the evidence of fragmentary source material that has only recently been recovered." -- Wilferd Madelung, author of *The Succession to Muhammad* "Drawing on an exhaustive array of Arabic, Persian and South Asian sources as well as the scattered results of modern scholarship on the Ismailis, Virani has produced a comprehensive and readable account of the complex, and often obscure, medieval history of the Nizari Ismailis. This book represents a major contribution to modern Ismaili studies." --Farhad Daftary, author of *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* "In order to show how the Ismaili Shi'is survived the Mongol onslaught of the thirteenth century, Shafique Virani employs a wide variety of sources in many different South-and South west-Asian languages. Some of these sources provide historically useful information only in the most oblique ways, and Virani's great achievement is to tease out meaning from what appear to be intractable materials. The resulting reconstruction of medieval Ismaili history is both scholarly and tender, subtle as well as moving." --Robert Wisnovsky, Director, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University "This is a masterful reconstruction of the history of the Ismailis of Iran, a minority Shi'i community that was forced underground in the thirteenth century by intense persecution. Reliable data on the Ismailis has been hard to come by-their libraries were destroyed and their reputations besmirched by hostile propaganda. Through painstaking archival research and careful

readings of previously unknown sources, Shafique Virani has significantly revised the traditional accounts of this community's history." --Ali Asani, author of *Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literatures of South Asia*

About the Author Dr. Shafique N. Virani is an Assistant Professor of Historical Studies and the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto.